TIRELESS IN RETIREMENT

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After teaching science for 24 years in Pinedale, Wyoming, I chose to "retire" in a unique way: I spent three months living on Easter Island, teaching science in the public high and middle schools as a volunteer. I also taught biology at night to high school students and adults who were unable to attend day school. I entered into a partnership with two Rapanui teachers. Together, we provided a multi-lingual classroom curriculum, with lectures in Spanish and Rapanui, and my contributions were based on lab-based classroom experiments.

I am very pleased and grateful to report that Wyoming's Sublette County School District Number 1 and the Pinedale Middle School donated much-needed science supplies and equipment for the Easter Island schools, which were shipped ahead of me and whose arrival constituted a significant event. Everyone was excited and helped me unpack each item with care and enthusiasm. Microscopes, water quality and soil analysis kits, digital scales, and many technical and laboratory supplies were helpful in enabling Rapanui students to understand the scientific method. My hosts, the Nikko Haoa family (owners of Hotel Ota'i), generously provided housing, food, and friendship during my stay. To them I am grateful.

I don't need to go into the familiar statistics about Easter Island, a tiny trapezoidal chuck of lava seemingly lost in the middle of the vast South Pacific, though I did find it personally interesting to note that the island's length is about the distance between the towns of Pinedale and Daniel, Wyoming (*i.e.*, 11 miles), bridging a geographical gap between my hometown and my adopted Polynesian abode. Wyoming was also represented by the presence of Charlie Love of Western Wyoming College, as three of his students were on the island involved in excavation projects, including work at an ancient site known as Miro O One.

I found myself in a continual state of awe by the sheer magnitude of the prehistoric labor that produced nearly a thousand *moai* and over 200 stone platforms (*ahu*). When gazing at these enormous and exquisite stone images many familiar questions came to mind: How were these ancient Polynesians, all alone on an incredibly remote island, able to carve, move, and then erect these massive monolithic statues? How were they able to place an elaborate, multi-ton red scoria stone top-hat, called *pukao*, upon these erected statues? And most of all, *why*? To learn that the *moai* were deliberately toppled during clan wars is a stunning testament to the vagaries of the Human Condition. Seeing hundreds of *moai* that appear to be unfinished, or abandoned (or perhaps deliberately left *in situ*) in the Rano Raraku quarry, is disconcerting. *Mata'a* (stone picks used to carve the statues) lie in abundance along the ancient *moai* roads used during transport, together with nearly 50 *moai* that apparently never reached their ceremonial destinations. Why is this? There are as about as many theories as there are archaeologists and other scientists offering explanations as to the how, why, when, and where of Easter Island.

Using the Digital Scale for the First Time!

The island holds closely many mysteries that may never be explained, but what we do know is this island has had a tumultuous history, having survived slave traders, Smallpox, and climatic changes, as well as European explorers and exploiters. Although Rapa Nui has been under the annexation of the Chilean government since 1888, the modern-day islanders have struggled to sustain a rich heritage of Polynesian culture and pride unique to Rapa Nui. Living in such an isolated and fragile island ecosystem, the people have learned to live without many material goods. On a daily basis they cope with limited natural resources such as fresh water, wood, fuel, and food, yet they are more than happy to share whatever they have with visitors. It is in their generous and friendly nature to give freely and live happily.

The diesel generators installed by the U.S. government provide electricity for Hanga Roa, of course, and hot water is now a standard in many houses. Television and the Internet are common and the growing ubiquitousness of automobiles has caused traffic jams (yes, traffic jams!), although horses are still a popular source of "public" transportation. The parallels between the children on Rapa Nui and those in Sublette County, Wyoming, are striking: In their extreme isolation, both appreciate even the smallest bit of knowledge or gestures from the outside world. The Rapanui children are curious about Wyoming, the Rocky Mountains, snow, cowboys, Western music, and just about anything to do with the USA.

The students and teachers in Hanga Roa were very encouraging and patient with my struggles to learn their language and they loved teaching me new words. They were

enthusiastic about learning how to use a microscope, and spent hours sharing one scope among two dozen of them. When I repaired the one overhead projector at the high school, it was a cause for celebration because it had been dysfunctional for several years. The lab experiments were a hit with both younger and older students because they loved "doing" science. Next year, on July 11, 2010, Easter Island will be the premium spot on the globe to observe the next total solar eclipse, with nearly five minutes of totality! With a telescope we took apart and cleaned, the students will have an enhanced opportunity to experience this phenomenon of nature.

It is important to remember that these children are members of one of the most endangered cultures in the world. There are very few remaining Rapanui people, so they are working desperately to teach their children the equally endangered Rapanui language and its unique cultural associations. The dances, songs, traditional arts, oral history, and games all contribute to connections between the past and the present. The Rapanui are also deeply concerned that their children will be prepared for the future and want them to have global affiliations. The lack of Internet connectivity within the Easter Island educational system is problematical but there is a promise for more technological opportunities for the students in the near future.

When the sun sets on Hanga Roa, a place where the shadows of the *moai* stand as silent sentries between land and sea, I know the satisfaction of having lived in the best of places, doing the best of things.

Iorana!

NAHOE TO NAHOE

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"We want *you* take us to Easter Island!" my two granddaughters pleaded last Spring. To my secret delight they refused to let me off the hook. So they, their mother and I began plotting our trip to Rapa Nui during the girls' 2008 Christmas vacation. My family knew of the annual trips I had made to the island during the 1980's to work on my doctorate in Anthropology[1] at UCLA, and they wanted a "hands on" tour. Yes, the trip would be costly, especially in a tanked economy, but I thought, like the MasterCard message, some things are priceless.

Flying from Tahiti to Rapa Nui on Christmas Eve and returning a week later on New Year's Eve would give us five days to view that tiny, rocky triangle way out in the South Pacific. Unlike the early explorers, however, our first glimpse of Rapa Nui was not from the sea. Instead small black patches of the island slowly appeared through rents in the early morning cloud cover. And then, finally, we were there, where friends laden with fragrant *hei tiare*[2] greeted us at Mataveri airport.

Soon after arriving, we headed out to see the archaeological sites. At Orongo one day, we listened to a fascinating tale about our guide's brother, the Franciscan priest Francisco ("Pancho") Nahoe. The two siblings[3] are the grandchildren of William Mulloy,[4] anthropologist from the University of Wyoming. While Josie Nahoe Mulloy's fair, pretty complexion reflects her mother's Irish-American background, Pancho's dark good looks stem straight from his paternal roots on Rapa Nui.

Josie told us about a village named Nahoe on the Marquesan island of Hiva 'Oa whose present inhabitants believe their ancestors had, in ancient times, colonized Rapa Nui. When they heard about a Rapa Nui member of the Nahoe family who was a Franciscan priest who also spoke their own language, they invited him to come tell them "what happened next to Hotu Matu'a".[5] Josie proceeded to relate the elaborate way in which the villagers welcomed her brother. Pancho, in his typically unassuming fashion, e-mailed me the following description of this event, which took place during Eastertide in 2000:

> *Well, I'm pretty sure that they would do as much for any visiting priest. Although it is located on the island of Hiva 'Oa, the village of Nahoe is in one of the more remote sectors and a priest only comes from 'Atuona about once every three to four months. The point, I think, is not the transference of the ancient notion of* tapu *onto the Catholic priest, in the sense that he is understood to be the modern equivalent of the* ariki[6]*. Rather, I think, the welcoming ceremony, once used to avoid the catastrophe of one's village becoming contaminated by the sacred, is now an appropriate and traditional way to welcome any more-or-less important visitor. In this case, the villagers are deliberately preserving an element of their Polynesian tradition that no longer has the same cluster of meanings today as once it may have had. Still, the adaptation is entirely organic, it seems to me, given the 19th century disintegration of traditional concepts of the* tapu *of persons, on the one hand, and the genuine respect for and enthusiasm about a visiting priest, on the other. I went there with a priest-friend of mine, Père Joseph Taupotini, himself a Marquesan.*
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> *As we approached the boundaries of the village, a woman waving* tī *leaves called out "'*A mai! 'A mai e matu'a Nahoe ē! 'A mai!*" While four young men carried me into the village on a chair, about a dozen or so danced around the chair with spears and clubs.*